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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Teacher Assessment Project at Stanford University, which is currently examining the use of performance-based methods for assessing teachers' competence. The research outlined in this work-in-progress explores the feasibility of documenting teaching through the use of portfolios. The paper identifies three scenarios--integrated language instruction, assessment of students, and creating a literate environment--that represent diverse, but critical tasks in the teaching of elementary literacy. The paper identifies the assumptions underlying the three scenarios and discusses how these assumptions have shaped the development of these works-in-progress. The paper suggests that these three cases-in-point in the teaching of elementary literacy offer a promising opportunity to explore to what extent documentation can reveal how teachers actually teach in their classrooms. (Three figures are included, and 14 references are appended.) (MS)

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DESIGNING PORTFOLIOS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF ELEMENTARY LITERACY TEACHING: WORK-IN-PROGRESS

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Running Head: Designing Portfolios

DESIGNING PORTFOLIOS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF ELEMENTARY LITERACY TEACHING: WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Introduction

The Teacher Assessment Project at Stanford University, a research program funded by the Carnegie Corporation, is exploring the use of performance-based methods for assessing teachers' competence. The models developed in this research may serve as prototypes for a national teacher certification program. The project has focused its attention in two areas: assessment center exercises and documentation through portfolios. In the first phase of the project, we experimented with performance assessment exercises in the areas of elementary mathematics and high school history. In the current phase of the project, we are studying the feasibility of using portfolios to document a teacher's knowledge and skills in the areas of elementary literacy and high school biology. (See Figure 1.)

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The literacy team is presently fieldtesting the use of portfolios to document the teaching of elementary literacy in three areas: Integrated Language Instruction, Assessment of Students, and the Literate Environment. These areas represent only three cases-in-point in the teaching of literacy.

Our primary research question is to find out to what extent documentation can reveal how teachers actually teach in their classrooms. The three areas that we have identified for documentation in elementary literacy--teaching and planning integrated language instruction, the assessment of students, and creating a literate environment--are opportunities for exploring this question. In this paper we will discuss the underlying assumptions and development of these three works-in-progress.

Documenting the Planning and Teaching of Integrated Language Arts

Artifacts of planning and teaching

To document their planning and teaching, we have asked teachers to include in their portfolios the following kinds of evidence: an overview of three to five weeks of instruction; details of two to three consecutive lessons; a roster of

literary works and other resources selected for use; copies of handouts; and samples of student work. Furthermore, we ask teachers to provide a videotape of three different forms of instruction: a large-group literature activity; a small-group discussion; and one-to-one writing conferences with two students of different skill levels. Possible supplements to videotaping include audiotaping or observation by a school administrator, resource person, mentor, or university specialist.

Documenting teacher thinking

Still, such written materials are merely the artifacts, the products of planning and teaching, and the videotapes are records of teaching as performance, at best. Beyond these things, we would like a portfolio to provide us with access to the thinking that has shaped decisions made. The process of planning should emerge as more important than lesson-plans-as-product.

Essential to effective instruction is a teacher's ability to analyze the process of implementing plans, with an eye toward troubleshooting and problem-solving. We have asked teachers to keep a planning journal as a means of tracking such instructional decisions, including a log of plans, adaptations, and reasons for adaptations. From the journal, the teacher selects entries to demonstrate successes, changes, things learned, and persisting problems. We have been less interested in virtuoso performance and more interested in encouraging teachers to reflect on their day-to-day instructional choices, their rationales for planning and adjustment.

We also ask for more than merely taped episodes of teaching for the simple reason that what works with one particular community of learners might not prove appropriate in another. Researchers such as Philips (1972) and Heath (1983) have found mismatches in schooling situations between the ways teachers orchestrate successful participation in reading, writing, and speaking activities, and the ways in which children of some communities have learned to participate in such activities in their homes. Good teaching is teaching in a context, sensitive to a particular community of learners. Why use a particular approach? What makes it appropriate to learners in this classroom? These are the questions that must be answered in the assessment process through various means: through rationale statements to accompany videotapes, through notes of interviews following observations, through taped interviews with teacher candidates at the assessment center following joint observation of a videotaped

lesson. Clearly articulated reasons for choices, then, rest at the heart of this inquiry.

Despite our requests for reflection and articulation of rationales, we will likely face a key problem in the documentation process: teachers rarely have opportunities to reflect on and to articulate what they do. Thus, while we have built into the documentation process opportunities and tools for reflection on and articulation of instructional decisions, we will likely find talented teachers unaccustomed to such articulation and unprepared to make explicit the tacit knowledge that drives their teaching. Likewise, we might find teachers whose abilities to argue reasons for choices exceed their abilities to help students learn. As our development work proceeds, we will continue to wrestle with this issue, exploring ways to help teachers reflect on and articulate their teaching wisdom, recognizing all the while the historical lack of institutional support for such acts.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Planning and teaching language arts: Points of emphasis

Beyond the challenges of planning and teaching in general, we focus now on the specific content area of elementary language arts focused on literature. Drawing on observations of talented teachers, wisdom of practice, and research, our development team has specified five areas we believe a certifiable teacher carefully considers in planning and teaching language arts. First, we ask for evidence that literature anchors the plans for three to five weeks of instruction (see center box of Figure 2). While skills work might be planned in, for example, vocabulary and reading comprehension, such activities, we would hope, would tend to arise from literature students are reading. Second, we ask for documentation of how the lessons integrate the language arts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, a practice currently advocated by recent literature of educational reform, research, and pedagogy (Busching & Schwartz, 1983); articulated by various state departments of instruction, including the most recent California English-Language Arts Framework (1987); and practiced by all of the talented teachers we knew and observed. Third, we ask for evidence that the teacher has linked the lessons to serve the teaching of concepts and skills over time. Through such linkages, the teacher demonstrates the ability to develop concepts and themes through literature, rather than merely treat individual lessons and pieces of literature in isolation.

Fourth, the effective teacher, we believe, does not plan such instruction without consideration of particular learners. Various issues emerge as central to tailoring lessons to learners (see box on the left of Figure 2). The teacher focuses especially on students' prior knowledge, demonstrating sensitivity to individual students' experiences and needs. Central to students' prior knowledge are their community and cultural experiences which shape much of what and how they have learned. The effective teacher, we suggest, considers such background experiences in planning and teaching. Fifth and finally, the teacher considers various desired student outcomes (see box at right in Figure 2), orchestrating rich language experiences for students and encouraging oral and written expression. The talented language arts teacher also treats literature as more than a body of facts. Since literature invites interpretation, the effective teacher encourages and respects individual opinion. Also, literature, including multicultural literature, can serve as a vehicle for broadening students' awareness of experiences and cultures beyond their own. The effective teacher of literature, we believe, works to sensitize students to such worlds of "the other."

Summary

To assess, for purposes of certification, the elementary school teacher's planning and teaching of language arts, we have focused on three areas of development for our field test. First, we have identified appropriate artifacts the teacher will collect and include in a portfolio. Second, we have developed, and will continue to develop, occasions and tools for reflection and articulation of instructional choices. And third, we have identified five points of emphasis in planning and teaching language arts, for which we would like to see the certifiable elementary school teacher of literacy provide evidence.

Documenting the Assessment of Students

The purpose of the assessment-of-students scenario is to provide teachers with an opportunity to document their classroom assessment practices. In this scenario, we ask teachers to document three areas of assessment: 1) the initial assessment of their class, 2) the ongoing assessment of each student, and 3) a focused assessment of three students who represent the diversity of challenges in their class. (See figure 3.) The three documentation tasks that we have set out for teachers in this scenario have been shaped by our assumptions of what

constitutes good assessment practices. In this section of the paper, we will present the view of classroom assessment driving the development of this work-in-progress.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

Assumptions in the assessment of students

Our work in the area of student assessment has been guided by the combined wisdom of research and practice. We reviewed the research literature on classroom assessment and consulted with researchers in the field of literacy. We discussed assessment practices with classroom teachers and observed talented teachers at work. Based upon our research and observations, we expect an exemplary teacher of elementary literacy to put the following assumptions about classroom assessment into practice:

• Emphasize ongoing assessment. Regular feedback is important for both students and teachers (Valencia, McGinley, & Pearson, in press; Teale, Hiebert, & Chittenden, 1987). A single snapshot of student achievement, such as an end-of-the-unit test, may be a misleading reflection of student learning and may not give the teacher enough information to make informed adjustments in instruction. Tracing a student's progress in literacy provides an opportunity for both student and teacher, individually and collaboratively, to reflect on past developments and plan future goals.

• Utilize a variety of assessment instruments and strategies. Knowledgeable teachers design, adapt, and select from a range of formal and informal assessments to draw conclusions about student achievement and implications for instruction (Valencia, McGinley, & Pearson, in press). While formal and informal assessment methods provide important information about student achievement, knowledgeable teachers understand the virtues and limitations of various assessment tools and methods.

We believe, however, that formal assessments, such as commercially published tests, are over-emphasized in the classroom, and informal assessments, such as spontaneous desk-side interviews with children, are under-valued. In the assessment-of-students scenario, we emphasize the use of informal assessments that are grounded in authentic classroom events. In fact, the term "informal" may be misleading. A teacher who has a clear purpose for

assessment and a knowledge of a wide range of classroom assessment tools is not "informal" in his or her practice of assessment, but "informed."

• Draw upon multiple sources of information from a variety of contexts. To make informed assessments of student achievement, knowledgeable teachers draw from multiple sources for their information (Valencia, McGinley, & Pearson, in press) and carry out assessment in a variety of contexts. The student who has trouble decoding a passage may not have difficulty understanding that passage when it is read to him or her. A student who struggles with a passage about whales written on a third grade level may have no trouble comprehending a passage about dinosaurs written on the sixth grade level. The context for assessment and the background knowledge of the student (Anderson, Reynolds, Schallart, & Goetz, 1977), as well as many other factors, affect a student's performance. A single indicator of reading comprehension may not give the full picture of a student's problems and potential.

• Link assessment with instruction. Assessment measures such as standardized tests that are distant from the teaching and learning taking place in the classroom offer teachers and students little guidance for improvement (Teale, Hiebert, & Chittenden, 1987). However, assessment measures that are closely linked to teaching and learning provide students and teachers with immediate and relevant feedback for improving their performance.

• Respect cultural diversity and individual differences. Good assessment is appropriate to the student's cultural background (Heath, 1983; Teale, Hiebert, & Chittenden, 1987) and individual learning style. A recent immigrant who cannot understand a simple passage in English may be capable of handling complex material in his or her native language. Or, to take a different example, teachers who rely exclusively on writing samples for assessing a student's literacy development run the risk of ignoring a student's skill in using oral language.

• Clearly communicate the results of assessments. Knowledgeable teachers effectively communicate the purpose and results of their assessments to a wide audience, including students, parents, administrators, other school personnel, and policymakers.

Summary

We believe that effective classroom assessment improves teaching and promotes learning for all students. Good classroom assessment means that the teacher has a purpose for assessment, that assessment is ongoing and grounded in classroom activities, and that a wide range of assessment devices and strategies are used in a variety of contexts to obtain multiple measures of student achievement. Teachers who effectively use assessment are sensitive to cultural diversity and able to evaluate a wide range of individual styles. These teachers can clearly communicate the results of their assessment to all interested parties, including students, parents, administrators, other school personnel, and policymakers. The development of the assessment-of-students scenario reflects these views.

Documenting the Creation of a Literate Environment

The purpose of this scenario is to determine if it is possible to have teachers document ways in which they establish a literate environment, a classroom environment that will promote literacy. But before we can ask teachers to do such a task, we must first define what constitutes a literate environment. The following discussion is an attempt to lay out the assumptions that have driven our development efforts.

First, all classrooms are literate environments; that is, all schooling is organized around the use and understanding of print. However, the term literate environment implies that some environments are more conducive to the development of children's literacy than others.

Second, schools and individual classrooms are embedded in at least two cultures: one, the culture of the community the school serves; and two, the larger literate culture in which both community and school are embedded. Schools, in turn, reflect these cultures' values and attitudes about literacy. If teachers are to be successful in helping their students become competent members of these cultures, then they must help socialize students into these cultures. To do so, teachers rely on a variety of methods, many of which are manifested in their classroom environments. What follows is a description of those elements that probably most affect children's literacy learning. (See Figure 4.)

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

Physical and material resources

Teaching and learning in schools take place in a variety of physical settings. All schools are equipped with basic kinds of furniture, classroom space, and print materials. However, teachers make choices in how to organize, display and use available resources. These choices reveal the teachers' understanding of literacy's uses, functions, and values in the larger culture. We would predict that exemplary teachers would reveal an understanding of how these choices affect their students' learning.

Teaching and learning as functions of social relationships

Teaching and learning depend upon a complex web of social relationships that teachers and students negotiate over time. Anthropologists such as Heath (1982) and Schiefflin and Cochran-Smith (1984) argue that patterns of interaction between adults and children have a more powerful effect on children's literacy learning than the types and quantity of material resources available. Subsequent success with school literacy tasks can often be a result of how adults and children involve themselves with print materials (Heath, 1983).

However, success in the acquisition of literacy can not be measured solely in terms of success with school-based literacy tasks. Children must acquire the skills and knowledge that they need to function as literate adults in the world outside of schools.

Exemplary teachers are ones who perceive the distinction between the acquisition of school-based versus nonschool literacy and who will develop the kinds of social relationships in their classrooms that will allow the acquisition of multiple kinds of literacy.

The emotional climate of the classroom

Cross-cultural studies of language socialization (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986; Ochs, 1986) reveal the role affect plays in children's acquisition of particular forms and functions of language. A similar argument can be made about the role of affect in the acquisition of literacy in school. Much of what children learn about literacy is conditioned by the emotional climate developed in the classroom. Successful teachers use this knowledge in creating a classroom environment where literacy is a valuable tool for communication rather than a

weapon that can be turned against students. In other words, activities involving reading and writing become opportunities for students to become empowered rather than times when their deficiencies are on display (McDermott, 1987).

Summary

Classrooms as literate environments lie on a continuum. However, while recognizing this belief, we cannot retreat to old notions--that there are only a few ways in which classrooms should be structured. The effectiveness of an environment in promoting literacy depends upon its ability to match the demands of the school with the values and beliefs held by members of both the immediate community and the larger literate culture. In other words, certain types of environments will be more appropriate for certain kinds of students. Exemplary teachers use this knowledge to define their classrooms in physical, social and emotional terms that enable the convergence of values, beliefs and needs between schools, communities, and society.

Conclusion

The research described in this paper is the first step in an attempt to explore the feasibility of documenting teaching through the use of portfolios. We have identified three scenarios—integrated language instruction, assessment of students, and creating a literate environment—that represent diverse, but critical tasks in the teaching of elementary literacy. We have tried to make explicit the assumptions underlying the three scenarios and discuss how these assumptions have shaped the development of these works-in-progress.

To what extent can documentation reveal how teachers actually teach in their classrooms? The three cases-in-point in the teaching of elementary literacy described in this paper offer a promising opportunity for exploring that question.

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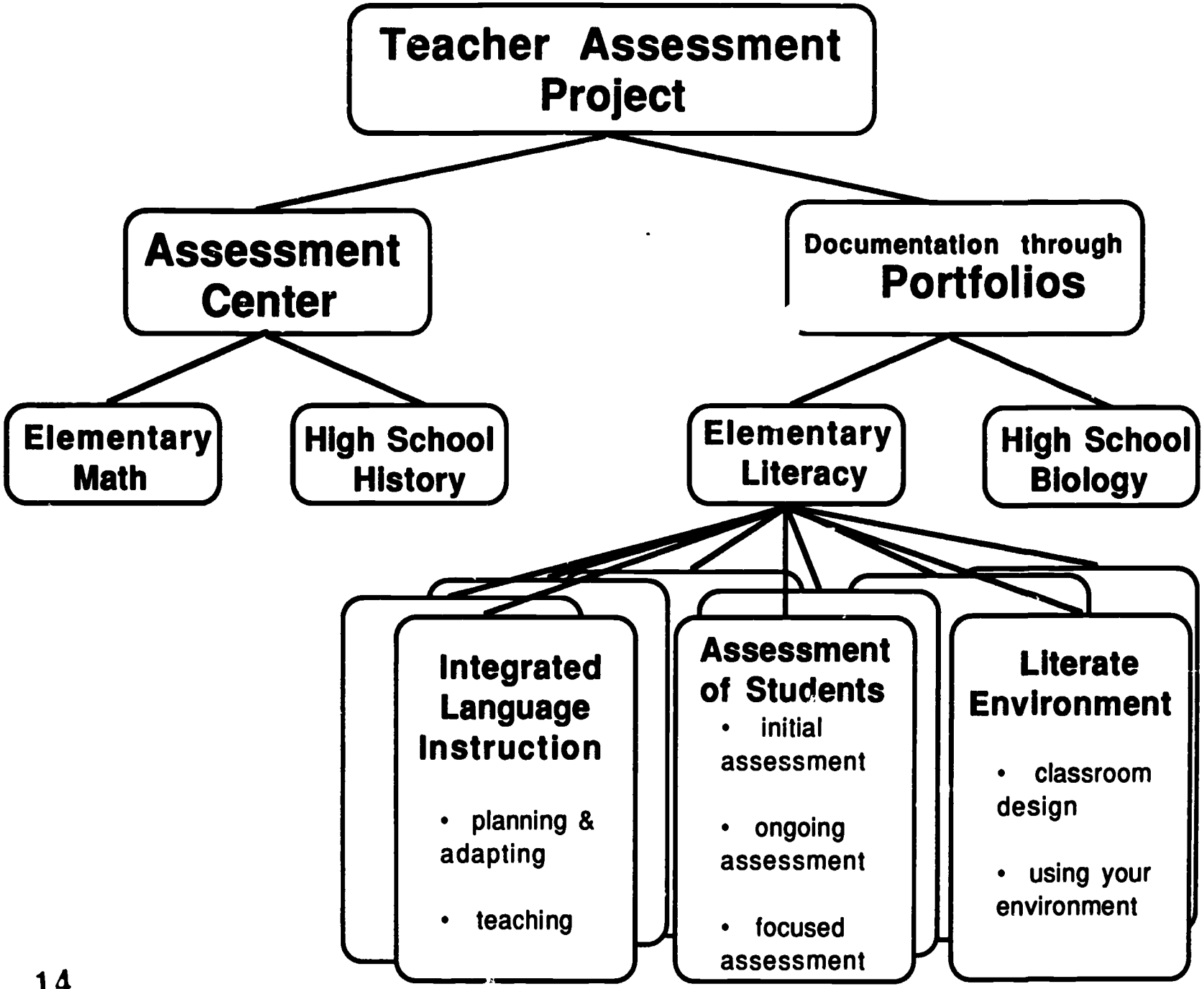
Teacher Assessment Project
Assessment Center
Documentation through Portfolios
Elementary Math
High School History
Elementary Literacy
High School Biology
Integrated Language Instruction
• planning & adapting
• teaching
Assessment of Students
• initial assessment
• ongoing assessment
• focused assessment
Literate Environment
• classroom design
• using your environment

Figure 1

INTEGRATED LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION: POINTS OF EMPHASIS

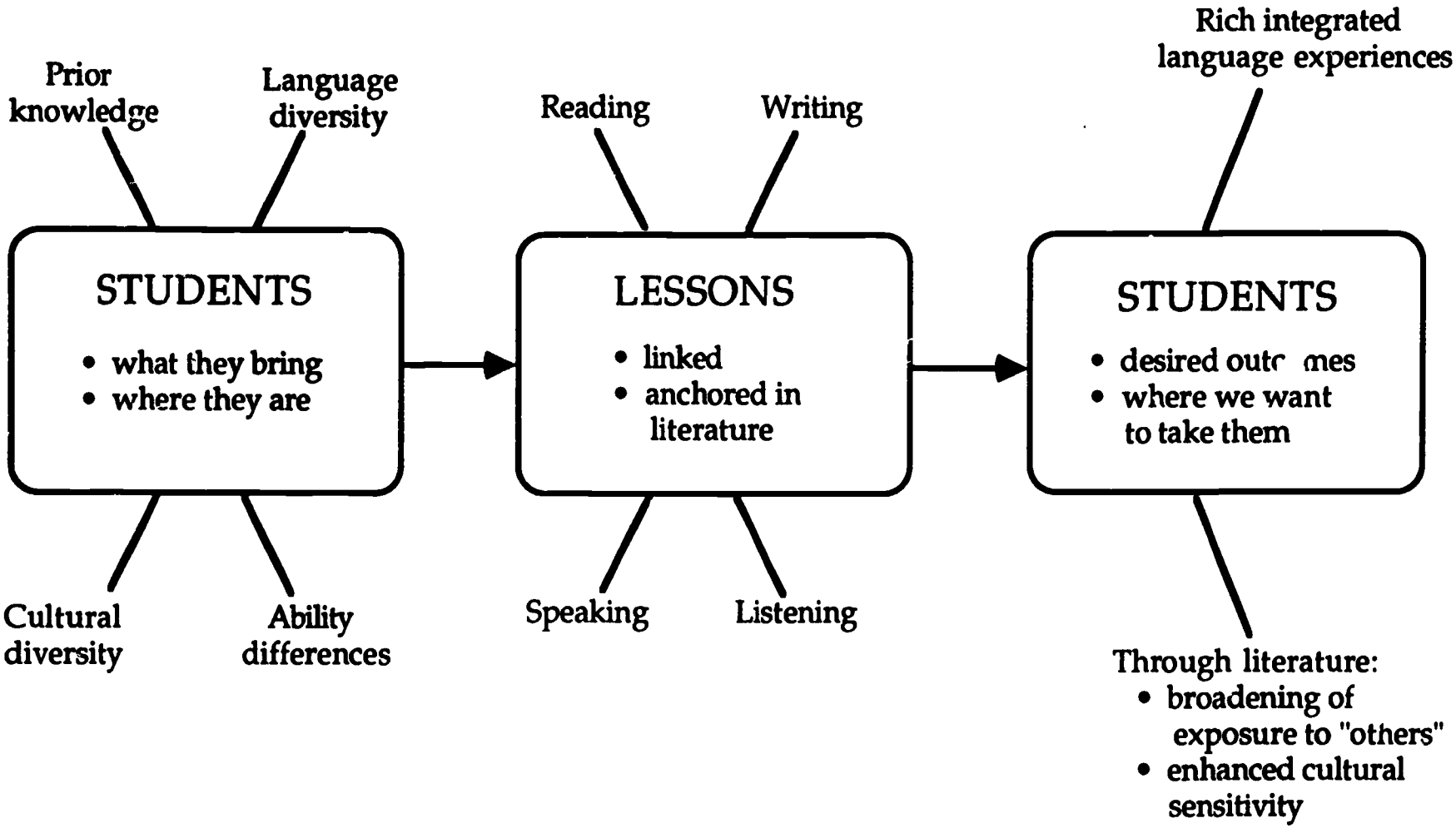

Figure 2

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

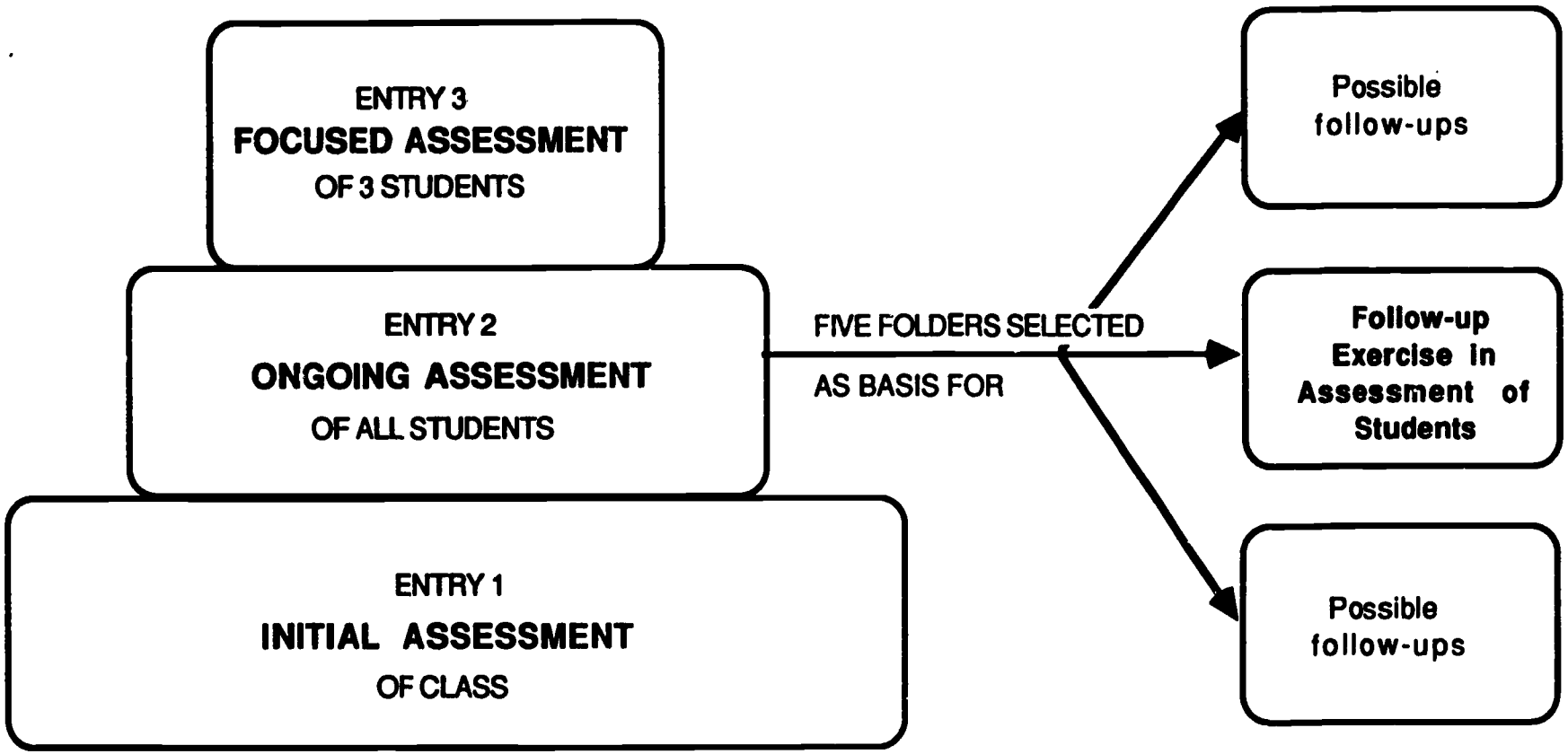

Figure 3

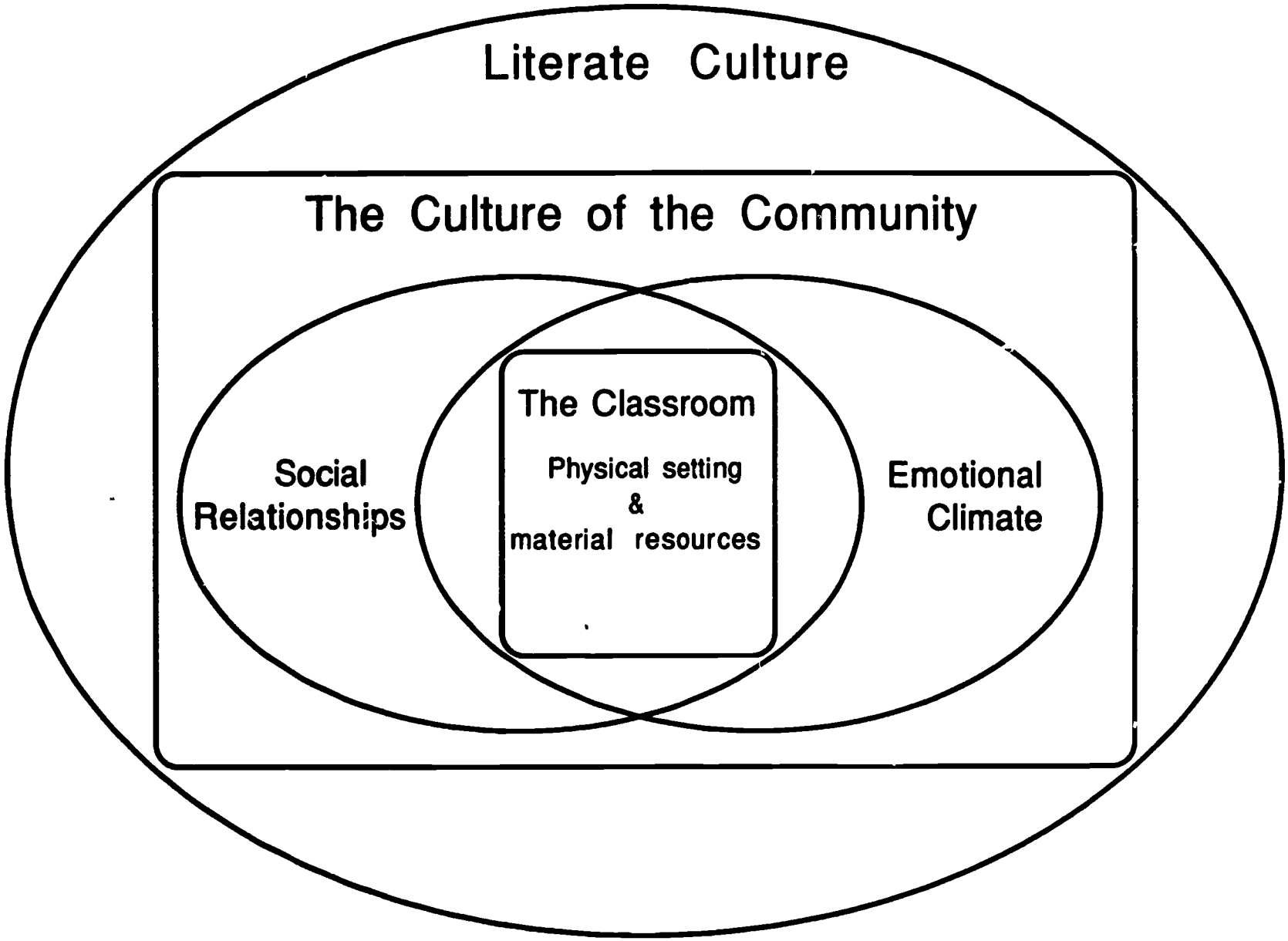
Literate Culture
The Culture of the Community
The Classroom
Physical setting
&
material resources
Social
Relationships
Emotional
Climate

FIGURE 4